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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

The Austin/Boston Connection: Five Decades of House Democratic Leadership, 1937-1989, by Anthony Champagne, Douglas B. Harris, James W. Riddlesperger, Jr., and Garrison Nelson (Texas A & M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354), 2009. Contents. Acknowledgments. Introduction. Notes. Index. P. 327. \$27.95 Hardcover.

Sweeping change characterized the Roosevelt era as the nation grappled throughout the 1930s with an economic collapse of severity and duration without precedent. Some of these changes were transitory while others proved fundamental and long lasting. The Democratic Party's transformation was unquestionably among the latter. Building upon the traditional Democratic base of the Solid South and northeastern cities, FDR reached out and converted disaffected Republican progressives, organized labor, white ethnics, and academics as well as religious and racial minorities. This new coalition brought an end to seven decades of Republican dominance. Its successful functioning over the next half-century, however, required Democrats to somehow manage the troublesome sectional, demographic, racial, and ideological tensions contained within the transformed party.

The Austin/Boston Connection examines the manner in which this juggling act transpired in the selection of House leaders. With one brief two-year exception, *every* speaker and majority leader selected by the House Democratic Caucus between 1940 and 1989 hailed from either the north Texas – southern Oklahoma region or the Greater Boston area. The authors assert the explanation for this enduring pattern of leadership choices lies in two separate but related factors.

First, the Democratic Party faced the complicated task of balancing and placating the party's myriad factions in "the people's chamber." Districts in these two regions were uniquely suited to this purpose. One contained a rural population of conservative small farmers south of the Mason-Dixon Line

where oil interests were minimal. The other was urban, liberal, industrial, northern, and Irish-Catholic. While generally reflective of the sectional characteristics of their neighbors, both areas “were demographic outliers within their regions, particularly in terms of racial composition.” (p. 9) Their representatives, therefore, were “uniquely well-suited middlemen who could bridge the intraparty divisions endemic in the New Deal coalition in the House.” (p. 11)

Personal friendships and, more specifically, a series of mentor-protégé relationships proved equally critical to the establishment and continuation of the Austin/Boston connection. Powerful mentors groomed successors, helping secure placement on the leadership ladder and facilitating their advancement. It began early in the century with Joseph Weldon Bailey’s tutelage of John Nance Garner and Sam Rayburn. With the transformation of the party in the Thirties, Garner helped guide Rayburn and John McCormick to House leadership. Their protégés – Carl Albert, Hale Boggs, Tip O’Neill, and Jim Wright – followed in their wake. Along the way, the bridge created by this lineage of leaders ran the House for a half-century, stabilized and maintained the New Deal coalition through some of the most contentious and challenging times in American history, and tamped down partisan hostilities on Capitol Hill.

This is an impressive study. The authors persuasively argue the thesis and effectively support it with an exhaustive examination of leadership selection battles spanning six decades. Despite its multiple authors, the narrative is seamless. Students of twentieth century American politics will want this volume in their libraries.

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Conflict on the Rio Grande: Water and the Law, 1879-1939,
by Douglas R. Littlefield (University of Oklahoma Press,
2008 Venture Drive, Norman, OK 73069), 2009. Contents.
Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Introduction. Conclusion.

Notes. Bibliography. Index. P. 299. \$39.95 Hardcover.

No one is more qualified to write on the development of water allocation law in western history than Douglas R. Littlefield. Littlefield has researched western water rights issues for more than two decades. He and his company, Littlefield Historical Research, received one of the 2008 Excellence in Consulting Awards from the National Council on Public History, and he has served as consultant and investigator on numerous legal cases related to water rights and western land use. His book, *Conflict on the Rio Grande*, examines the battle to regulate the use of the Rio Grande River in the El Paso Valley and north into New Mexico Territory's Mesilla Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Littlefield's story is a political history of the struggle between various government units, developers, settlers, federal courts, and Mexican and United States diplomats over how to ensure water continued to flow along the Rio Grande. He sees the conflict between those who called for an international dam in the El Paso Valley and the investors who wanted a dam at Elephant Butte as one of the early determining incidents in the development of western water rights. The eastern part of the United States bases water laws upon riparian rights—landowners along a waterway may utilize water, but not to the detriment of other landowners downstream. Western water rights, on the other hand, developed from the reality that much western land lacks moisture, and water is a commodity that improves land value. Thus, western water law is roughly based on a first-come, first-served ideology—whoever uses the water first has the primary claim. In the early 1900s, however, no clear precedent existed to determine where one set of water laws began and another ended. Texas used both eastern and western versions, for example, although western states generally adopted prior-appropriation laws instead of eastern states' riparian policies. The argument over where to build a dam illustrated the confusion over which water law interpretation to use and who had authority to decide. Littlefield sees the dispute over damming the Rio Grand, the

Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902, and the 1904 National Irrigation Congress as a Progressive Era solution to the debate.

Littlefield's exploration of the political and legal challenges over the construction of a dam either near El Paso or Elephant Butte has all the characteristics of a Dickens's Bleak House set in the American West. Littlefield's story reveals the personal, emotional, and financial self-interest often ignored in historical narratives that focus on various stakeholders' political and ideological claims. He challenges the prevailing historical consensus that the federal government decided the issues over western water laws in the mid-twentieth century and instead sees the Rio Grande dispute as the beginning of this resolution. He also challenges the idea that Progressive-era governmental regulation originated in Washington, DC and instead demonstrates rather convincingly that the compromise worked out in 1904 was an agreement arrived at by local interests who then demanded the federal government implement it as law. East Texas historians will find little in Littlefield's book relating to their part of the world; however, the book's focus on Progressive-Era politics, settlement in Western Texas, and the issue of water rights will no doubt pique the interest of students of Texas history and the American West.

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Storm Over The Bay: The People of Corpus Christi And Their Port, by Mary Jo O'Rear (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354), 2009. Contents. List of Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Prologue. Notes. Bibliography. Index. P. 187. \$24.95 Hardcover.

Flamboyant land speculator, smuggler, and trader Henry L. Kinney arrived in the Corpus Christi Bay region in 1839 and established a trading post on the bluff overlooking the bay; thus began what is today known as the city of Corpus Christi.

Growth of the community was sporadic at first, but when Gen. Zachary Taylor placed his troops on the south side of the Nueces River in 1845 before the outbreak of the Mexican War, the community received population and economic boosts. After the establishment of the Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy ranches in nearby counties, Corpus Christi became the shipping headquarters for the ranchers' hides and tallow, further promoting the town as a commercial center. The prominent South Texas ranchers also played significant roles in the establishment of rail traffic that eventually connected Corpus Christi to Mexico.

As the town expanded, a collage of personalities with diverse backgrounds and interests dotted the Corpus Christi landscape. Each, to varying degrees, proved important in the development of the city in some way. George Blücher, son of Prussian immigrants and owner of the Lone Star Ice Factory, along with his able assistant Nicamor Mora, a Mexican migrant, worked diligently to move the icehouse into the electrical age. Irish-born Thomas Hickey settled in the Texas coastal town after the American Civil War, and within three decades he rose from virtual obscurity to head cashier and board of directors member of the Corpus Christi National Bank. African American Henry Larkin operated a successful barbershop while at the same time other black entrepreneurs contributed to the city's economic maturation. A pivotal figure in economics, politics, and the restoration of the community after the destructive 1919 hurricane was Henry Pomeroy "Roy" Miller.

The political scene in Corpus Christi and Nueces County incorporated a genuine South Texas flavor of machine politics when men such as Robert Kleberg and Miller vied with Walter E. Pope and Gordon Boone for political supremacy. Even Archie Parr, the Duke of Duvall, was periodically injected into the local political mixture. Activities of office holders at times were questionable which led to suits, counter-suits, and state investigations.

Because of the barrier islands and the bluff, Corpus Christians looked upon themselves as immune from the ravages of

hurricanes. They thought the barrier islands would lessen the impact of a hurricane's high winds, and the bluff was amply elevated to offer protection from tidal waves. This view came to a sudden and shocking halt when the 1919 hurricane surged into the coastal community, causing tremendous property damage and a consequential loss of lives. Flood waters and extraordinary stormy winds devastated North Beach and seriously crippled the downtown Corpus Christi area. Despite the belief by some residents that the city would not recover, Corpus Christi rebounded and continued to thrive.

For decades the coastal community sought to become a deepwater port to rival those at Houston and Galveston, and within seven years after the horrendous hurricane, Corpus Christi achieved its goal. The feat was accomplished through the persistence of visionary local civic and political leaders. At the national level, Congressman John Nance "Cactus Jack" Garner of Uvalde was a key figure in securing the port.

Mary Jo O'Rear has written a lively, readable, entertaining, and valuable historic work that successfully traces Corpus Christi from its beginning to the early 1920s when the city became a deepwater port. The author artfully weaves individuals from all walks of life into the narrative to demonstrate the economic, cultural, and political dynamics of the community. *Storm Over The Bay* is a worthy addition to the writings on Texas history.

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Cuttin' Up: How Early Jazz Got America's Ear, by Court Carney (University Press of Kansas, 2502 Westbrooke Circle, Lawrence, KS 66045), 2009. Contents. Notes. Bibliography. Index. P. 219. \$34.95 Softcover.

Scott Joplin, a musical genius from East Texas, popularized ragtime music at the turn of the twentieth century. In doing so, he contributed immeasurably to the creation and ascendancy of

jazz. Joplin's influence on music certainly is an accomplishment that brings pride to East Texas. Yet, Joplin's story, and the history of jazz, is one that music lovers everywhere should appreciate. In *Cuttin' Up*, Court Carney uses personal and local stories like Joplin's, a story intertwined with issues pertaining to race, class, identity, urbanization, migration, and consumerism, to underscore the causes, growing pains, and costs of America's modernization. "What I have aimed to construct," says Carney, "is a conceptual framework that addresses the cultural contours of the 1920s and the creation of the modern age by focusing on the development of the racialized culture of jazz music and the complex mechanizations that led to its national dominance" (5).

Carney traces the development of jazz during the first decades of the twentieth century in three segments: Creation, Dispersion, and Acceptance. He describes the racial undertones of both jazz and the American landscape and how music is both an outcome and medium of modern American culture. Carney is at his best here. More than just a jazz narrative, Carney weaves music with larger historical forces emblematic of modernizing America. He convincingly shows how jazz is best understood when considered through the dynamics of race, class, gender, residential patterns, consumerism, commercialization, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. The best examples of this are Carney's recounting of jazz's creation in Part 1 (Creation). He highlights the process of urbanization in the creation of the musical forms of ragtime, blues, and jazz. For Carney, urbanization is a process affecting and affected by music as an actual place. Looking to urbanization, he traces the impact of the Great Migration and the incorporation of African American culture in American life. He concludes that ragtime both helped inculcate rural African Americans to urban life and reflected "the ordered chaos of city life" (17). Carney thus reveals how urbanization played, quite literally, into the creative evolution of music. With New Orleans, he perfects this story as the city "served as an urban catalyst for the development of jazz" (33). The physical and cultural structure of the city itself—affected by and reflective of Jim

Crow, not to mention racial constructions (e.g., the conflation of Creole and Black)—influenced the creation and style of New Orleans jazz. Carney deftly connects larger historical forces, like urbanization, with the local and personal, like New Orleans and Jelly Roll Morton.

The story of jazz in New Orleans or elsewhere is about more than urbanization. Carney recognizes early on that jazz did not “follow a straight trajectory from one particular source” (p. 30). Forces like technological advancement and consumer culture, for example, played significant roles too. While this is shown throughout the book, Carney best shows the influence in Part II (Dispersion). Focusing on Chicago, he highlights the development of the recording industry that helped spread jazz nationally. In New York, Carney places the popularity and dispersion of jazz squarely in terms of technology and consumerism by looking at how jazz musicians, particularly Duke Ellington, harnessed the power of the radio industry. In Los Angeles, Carney shows how “[t]echnologically driven diffusion—not music originality—delineated the city’s contribution to early jazz, and . . . succeeded in bringing jazz music to the nation” (p. 103). Specifically, Hollywood and the film industry promoted the fusion of image and sound that redefined jazz’s marketable power. Film consequently led to the acceptance and variation of jazz for a mostly White middle-class audience and represented jazz’s ascendancy from rural African American art form to national White soundtrack.

The last sentence of *Cuttin’ Up* captures well the larger meaning of the book. “Created by (and reflective of) the larger pattern of modernization reconfiguring the nation between the 1890s and 1930s, jazz music thus serves as an unambiguous articulation of the cultural transformation of America in the early twentieth century” (p. 157). At the heart of this modern cultural transformation were historical forces like urbanization, technology, and consumerism. Other forces, to be sure, scored an influence and receive Carney’s attention. Any review of *Cuttin’ Up*, however, would be remiss not to note Carney’s skillful

handling of race. In the final part of the book (*Acceptance*), Carney spotlights how White Americans largely dismissed African Americans from the early jazz story. Indeed, in a tragic irony of names, Paul Whiteman and his orchestra represented the whitewashing of jazz as he performed at Carnegie Hall in 1924 and neglected to recognize or represent African American influence and style. Jazz transformed into something palpable for white audiences, which essentially underscored the ascendancy, dominance, and manipulation of white middle class culture and values in modern America.

Actually, throughout the book, Carney gives attention to the dynamics of race and jazz's history. Jazz reflected the experience of African Americans in a segregated society, particularly in cities like New Orleans, Chicago, and New York. Jazz also represented a painful paradox: while providing new opportunities for many African American performers, the commercial dispersion and viability of jazz to a broader national (white) market necessitated the enforcement of gross racial stereotypes and further marginalization. The story of Hollywood and Louis Armstrong demonstrates this point. In a short film adaption (*A Rhapsody in Black and Blue*) of Armstrong's song "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You," he is seen singing the song dressed in animal skins on a stage covered in bubbles and "playing both a legitimate jazz star as well as an entertaining (and harmless) clown" (p. 116). Jazz's popularity also sparked rival interpretations within the African American community as some lamented that a poor image of jazz (regardless of validity) would further contribute to negative stereotyping of African Americans. In the end, white American culture absorbed African American culture—yet again—and then dismissed their influence.

Ultimately, Carney's own words sing flawlessly in a book that underscores the significance of jazz in America's modern transformation.

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